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# aarp

is a journal whose main theme is work in progress, giving the younger as well as the more established scholars an opportunity to air views and ideas. With that in mind we do not demand that any work should necessarily be definitive, rather, that it should provoke comment and discussion, the results of which can be published in subsequent issues.

The scope of the journal covers areas from the Mediterranean through the Middle East to the Far East in all fields of art and archaeology, with the emphasis on subjects of a transcultural interest. 'aarp' publishes an Index of work currently being carried out at archaeological sites in the areas covered by the journal. 'aarp' also includes a list of theses connected with the art and archaeology of these areas which have been recently accepted by universities.

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**WORK IN PROGRESS**

<b>THE HELIODORUS PILLAR: A FRESH APPRAISAL</b> John Irwin	<b>1</b>
<b>INDO-ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE: A COMMENTARY ON SOME FALSE ASSUMPTIONS</b> John Burton Page	<b>14</b>
<b>GRAPHIC EVIDENCE FOR MUGHAL ARCHITECTURAL PLANS</b> E.S. Smart	<b>22</b>
<b>THE MASGID-I GUMA ISFAHAN: AN ARCHITECTURAL FACADE OF THE 3RD CENTURY H.</b> Eugenio Galdieri	<b>24</b>
<b>AN OCTAGONAL SHRINE EXCAVATED AT GHUBAYRA</b> Geza Fehervari	<b>35</b>
<b>THE SOUTHERN ROUTE TO MASHAD: CARAVANSERAI BETWEEN YAZD AND TORBAT HAIDARIYEH</b> Jenny Housego	<b>41</b>
<b>THE TIMURID IMPERIAL STYLE: ITS ORIGINS AND DIFFUSION</b> Eleanor G. Sims	<b>56</b>
<b>THE MEDICI AND CHINA</b> George R. Loehr	<b>68</b>
<b>AARP INDEX</b>	<b>78</b>

## THE HELIODORUS PILLAR: A FRESH APPRAISAL

John Irwin

The famous pillar at Besnagar (fig. 1) with an inscription of the second century B.C. describing it as a Garuda-standard erected by Heliodorus, a Greek ambassador, in honour of Vasudeva, god-of-gods, needs no introduction to a specialist audience of Indian historians<sup>1</sup>. But since our aim here is to break new ground, it is not a bad idea to begin with a summary of what has been said and thought about it hitherto.

Besnagar in Central India, where the pillar stands, is the site of the ancient mercantile city of Vidisa, about six miles from Sanci. This region owed its prosperity in early times to local fertility of soil (still famous for grain-growing), and to its location on the *daksinapatha* or "southern trade route" linking the Ganges valley with the Deccan and the seaports of the West coast. The city had been founded at the confluence of two rivers, the Betwa and the Beś, and the pillar stands outside the fork on what must have been the north-eastern periphery of the city (see plan at fig. 3). Its present height, with crowning sculpture missing, is about eighteen feet above modern ground-level, where there is a square platform or *cabutra* of comparatively modern construction. Originally the shaft had stemmed out of the ground without any plinth, and ground-level was more than three feet lower than it is to-day.

Compared with so-called "Asokan" pillars, the Heliodorus is barely half the size. Carved in pinkish-brown sandstone, it was originally well polished, but, not to such a high lustre as the "Asokan" pillars.<sup>2</sup> Also unlike the latter, the Heliodorus shaft is faceted and highly ornamented. Surviving components of the capital include a bell, bead-and-reel chain, and a rather heavy, square abacus (much damaged by lightning, it is said). On parts of the abacus are traces of geese-and-honeysuckle ornament (fig. 2).<sup>3</sup>

The pillar was first brought to notice by Alexander Cunningham in the 1870's<sup>4</sup> long

before it was known to be inscribed. It was then under worship by a local Saivite sect calling it Kham Baba, and its surface was thickly encrusted with red-lead paste applied in ritual. Both high and low castes were paying homage, and animals were being sacrificed. The attendant priest or *pujari* lived in a modern house built on top of an adjacent mound, known to be of ancient origin.

Although assured to the contrary, Cunningham suspected that an inscription was concealed beneath the encrustations of paste. He sensed intuitively the monument's historical importance, describing it as one of «*the most curious and novel*» of all his discoveries. However, he then went on to make a number of false inferences. For instance, he assumed that it was of Gupta origin and that the original crowning emblem had been a fan-palm which he found lying on the ground nearby. So certain did he feel about this that when he came to draw the shaft, he depicted it with this emblem on top.<sup>5</sup> He also rendered inaccurately the ornamental details of the shaft, showing the band of half-rosettes as whole-rosettes, and putting this band in the wrong place (too high up). The shaft's upper band of swag-like ornament and birds he left out altogether. He also omitted the section where the shaft breaks from sixteen into thirty-two facets.

A few yards further off, Cunningham found a second pillar-capital, this time with an emblem in the form of a water-monster or *makara*. No trace of the shaft was discovered; but once again his draughtsman's imagination went to work, and he published a drawing of how this particular pillar might have appeared when complete, and in scale relationship to the Heliodorus.<sup>6</sup>

Half-a-mile away, he found a third pillar-capital of approximately the same scale and period-style. This time the crowning emblem was in the form of a *kalpa-druma* or wishing-

## HELIDORUS PILLAR



Fig. 1

tree<sup>7</sup> — the type of tree popular in ancient Indian folklore as producing from its branches all kinds of material wealth such as money, jewels and clothes. Cunningham thought that all these pillar-remains had belonged to the same site as the Heliodorus, but he did not explain why so many votive pillars should have been concentrated before one particular shrine, nor what their precise meaning and function might have been.

Thirty years later, in 1909, the Heliodorus Pillar came into the news again with the discovery of the inscription on its shaft.<sup>8</sup> Carved in Brahmi characters, it stated that the pillar was a *Garuda-dhvaja*, literally 'Garuda-standard', erected by one Heliodorus, a Bhagavata, the son of Dion, from Taxila, in honour of Vasudeva, god-of-gods. Heliodorus further described himself in the inscription as having come as envoy of king Antialkidas to king Kasiputra Bhagabhadra.

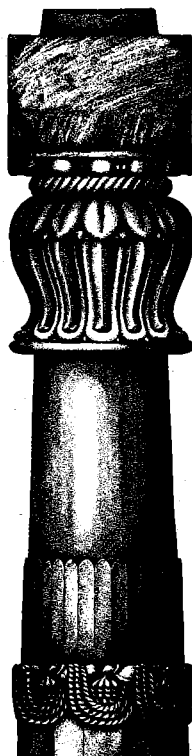
Antialkidas, well-known from his coinage, was a Greek who ruled between the Hindu Kush and the Jhelum in the latter part of the second century B.C. As to Kasiputra, most scholars have until recently identified him with the

ninth Sunga king in the Puranic list; but excavations by West German archaeologists at Sonkh, near Mathura, have now provided evidence to suggest that imperial Sunga rule at Vidisa did not extend beyond 120 B.C., and that was the name of a local ruler<sup>9</sup>.

As to Heliodorus himself, his name being pure Greek he was assumed to have had Greek blood, and this encouraged the further conclusion that he was a foreigner converted to the cult of Vasudeva, the followers of which called themselves Bhagavatas. Although an important cult in northern India in the second century B.C., its history and origins are obscure; but on the grounds that the worship of Krsna and Visnu were linked with this cult, it has been regarded as a kind of proto-Vaisnavism.

An additional point of interest about the Heliodorus inscription is that its last line includes what seems to be a quotation from the Mahabharata<sup>10</sup> — an advocacy of the virtues of Restraint, Renunciation and Rectitude. This was interpreted as a rare instance of a Greek being versed in Indian epic literature.

The first serious archaeological excavations were conducted at Besnagar between 1913 and



Column of  
Heliodorus  
(Detail)

Fig. 2

1915 under D.R.Bhandarkar, who dug a network of trenches shown in the plan at Fig. 4. A number of interesting discoveries were made,<sup>11</sup> but we shall have time here to focus only on those of direct relevance to the history of the pillar. (A severe limitation of the operation was that Bhandarkar was not at this time allowed to dig into the mound which supported the *pujari's* house, recognised as the logical site of the shrine to Vasudeva.) Among the facts he did establish was that from earliest times the site had been subject to major floods. The direction of the flood-waters being indicated by arrows in the plan at fig. 4.

Bhandarkar dug a trench into the foundations of the Heliodorus Pillar from the north side. The stratification he noted was most revealing, yet at the time Bhandarkar did not apparently recognise the full significance of his discoveries, as we shall later learn. Fortunately, he published a photograph (fig. 7) and a detailed drawing (elaborated at fig. 8). Three salient facts emerged: (1) that the shaft continued below ground as an octagon, the last three feet being left untrimmed; (2) that original ground-level was about 1 3/4 inches

above the junction between trimmed and untrimmed sections of the shaft; and (3) that beneath the shaft were two placement stones, with a layer of stone-metal between. Bhandarkar did not try to draw any historical conclusions from these facts.

Another half-century elapsed, until 1963-65, when the Archaeological Survey of India resumed excavations at the site, this time under M.D.Khare, who had permission to demolish the *pujari's* house and to investigate the ancient mound underneath. Since no report of these excavations has yet been published, there is an obvious risk in commenting on this excavation, but as a hint of what we may expect to come, Khare wrote a popular article in the art journal *Lalit Kala*.<sup>12</sup> Although inadequate from a scientific point of view, we have to make what use of this article we can.

From circumstantial evidence, Khare concluded that the shrine contemporary with the erection of the Heliodorus Pillar had stood on top of the mound, although all traces had apparently been expunged by the time the modern *pujari's* house was built. The mound itself was found to have retaining walls of brick,

## HELIDORUS PILLAR

and digging down to the very bottom (that is, to the original surface-level of the site), he reached traces of a still earlier elliptical foundation (clearly visible in the photograph at fig. 9). These he interpreted as the foundations of an elliptical temple built of perishable materials at least a century before the erection of the Heliodorus Pillar. This temple, he concluded, had been destroyed by flood before 200 B.C., whence the mound was raised and another shrine built on top. It was after the building of the second shrine that Heliodorus erected his pillar. Khare then adds the following interesting information: «*That more than one pillar may have been erected in one alignment (N - S) outside the eastern rubble wall, is indicated by the traces of several pits at uniform distances with similar filling as that of the Heliodorus pillar, as confirmed by an exposed section cut into a pit and with indication of at least three more on the plan in the trenches excavated on the eastern side of the mound... The plan of the pits, probably dug for the other four pillars... is in alignment with the rubble wall only and not with the temple of Period I.*» In other words, Khare is here suggesting that all pillar-remains post-date the construction of the second shrine.

Before making our own comments on the evidence, let us now sum up the evidence as so far presented by Bhandarkar and Khare. Amalgamating the evidence, we get a picture of three phases in the history of the site.

*Phase I* (see fig. 5), possibly 4th/3rd century B.C. At this stage there was an elliptical shrine (said to be a temple) founded at original ground-level. This shrine had been destroyed by floods by 200 B.C.

*Phase II*, about 200 B.C. An earthen mound with brick retaining walls was raised on top of the foundations of the elliptical shrine. On top of the mound is thought to have been built a second shrine to Vasudeva, all traces of which have disappeared.

*Phase III* (see fig. 6), late 2nd century B.C. Heliodorus appeared on the scene and erected his famous pillar. A number of other pillars were also erected in an alignment running north-south from the Heliodorus.

So much, then, for what has been said and thought hitherto about the Heliodorus Pillar. We shall now review the evidence in light of knowledge more recently gained, particularly in research on 'Asokan' pillars.

First, a few observations about the site itself. One thing we ought to recognise is that the site of the Heliodorus Pillar is a classic example of a *tirtha* — the type of holy watering-place which we would further define as the sacred spot *par excellence* of prehistoric and proto-historic India. Its components are a river-ford, the confluence of two streams, and an ancient crossroads. (The antiquity of this particular site is confirmed by the discovery of neolithic and chalcolithic implements, separately reported.)<sup>13</sup> From what we know about *tirthas* elsewhere, we can safely assume that the site was marked by a sacred grove, or at any rate a sacred tree.

From all this it is obvious that whatever conclusions we are going to reach about the Vasudeva shrine and its surviving votive pillars, they must have represented a relatively late intrusion into what was already a very ancient religious site or 'sacred centre'. In India, as elsewhere, the basic components of the ancient 'sacred centre' were tree, pillar and altar-throne — all cosmic symbols representing a mystical link between sacred and profane, and variously described in the literature of comparative religion as *axis mundi*, navel-of-the world (Greek *omphalos*), Centre of the Universe, and so forth. It is strange that not a single writer on the Heliodorus Pillar hitherto has bothered to state that tree-worship continues at the same site up to the present day (the sacred tree is visible in the background at fig. 1; at its base — but not visible in the photograph — are stelae and the offerings of worshippers).

Taking now a second look at the foundations of the Heliodorus Pillar as revealed by Bhandarkar's excavation in 1913 (figs. 7 and 8) we are bound to ask a question hitherto ignored: why are there *two* placement stones under the shaft?

Those who have followed recent research on 'Asokan' Pillars<sup>14</sup> will remember that the method of foundation involving placement-stones was a relatively late introduction. We called it Method 'A', to distinguish it from Method 'B', which was pre-Mauryan method. 'A' required only one placement-stone. The fact that there are two stones here, with a layer of stone-metal between, can mean only one thing: that an earlier stone pillar had been erected at the same spot, and that it was almost certainly destroyed by flood. Possibly the

earlier pillar was destroyed by the same flood which washed away the earlier shrine, but this cannot be proved. What we can claim with confidence is that when Heliodorus erected his famous pillar he was simply replacing an earlier stone votive pillar.

The inscription, you will remember, calls it a *Garuda-dhvaja*, literally 'Garuda-standard'. This is perhaps the earliest recorded instance of the term *dhvaja* being applied to a monumental stone column, and its use deserves close attention. In early Indian literature, the term *dhvaja* is applied specifically to *portable* standards bearing either flags with insignia or animal-emblems.

The custom of carrying animal-standards in front of an army in battle extended wherever Aryan culture spread in Asia and in Europe, inheriting still more ancient traditions of the cult of the sacred standard traceable in Western Asia from at least as early as 2,000 B.C.<sup>15</sup>

In Indian epic literature there are many references to show that the first aim in combat was destruction of the enemy's *dhvaja*, because to destroy his standard was to leave him divinely unprotected. What is more, the *dhvaja* was worshipped on the battlefield by the rite of circumambulation (*pradakshina*) in the belief that the protective deity was actually incumbent in the emblem.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the *dhvaja* was not simply a symbol, but an actual manifestation of the divine. It is possible that an Aryan version of the standard-cult had merged with a still earlier indigenous cult of the portable animal-emblem, evidence of which appears in seals of the Harappan culture.<sup>17</sup> Also at this point we should not overlook the fact that in Vedic literature the term *dhvaja* was linked and sometimes used interchangeably with *ketu*, an abstract concept implying "luminous insignia". Significantly, the *yupa* is described in Rigveda III, 8, 8 as "the *ketu* of the sacrifice", thus betraying at least a metaphysical association between the sacrificial stake of the Vedic altar and the sacred standard carried into battle.

We know what portable *dhvajās* looked like in the second century B.C., because they are depicted in relief sculptures of the period. For instance, the example at fig. 10 in a Bharhut relief shows a queenly personage on horseback carrying a *Garuda-dhvaja*, the shaft of which consists of a plain, smooth pole typical of all

such portable standards. We have shown in previous lectures that this type of *dhvaja* shares the same aesthetic heritage as the so-called Asokan pillar — in other words, that the latter is morphologically related to the portable standard and can be regarded as a sort of blown-up emblem-bearing pole. Yet this description does not in the least apply to the Heliodorus Pillar, notwithstanding the term *dhvaja* being used in the inscription on its shaft. The only feature it might be said to have in common with 'Asokan' pillars is the 'bell'. Otherwise it differs in having a form much closer to a post than to a pole.

Once recognised in this light, its true aesthetic lineage is not difficult to trace. But before doing so, let us examine its details a little more closely.

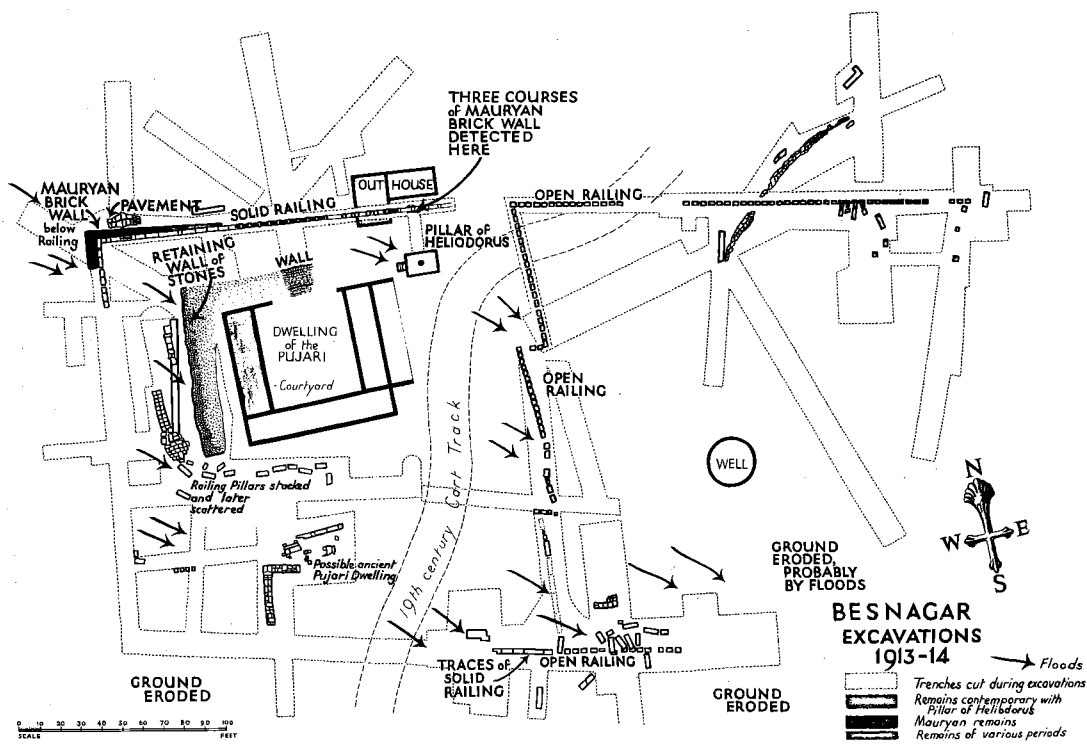
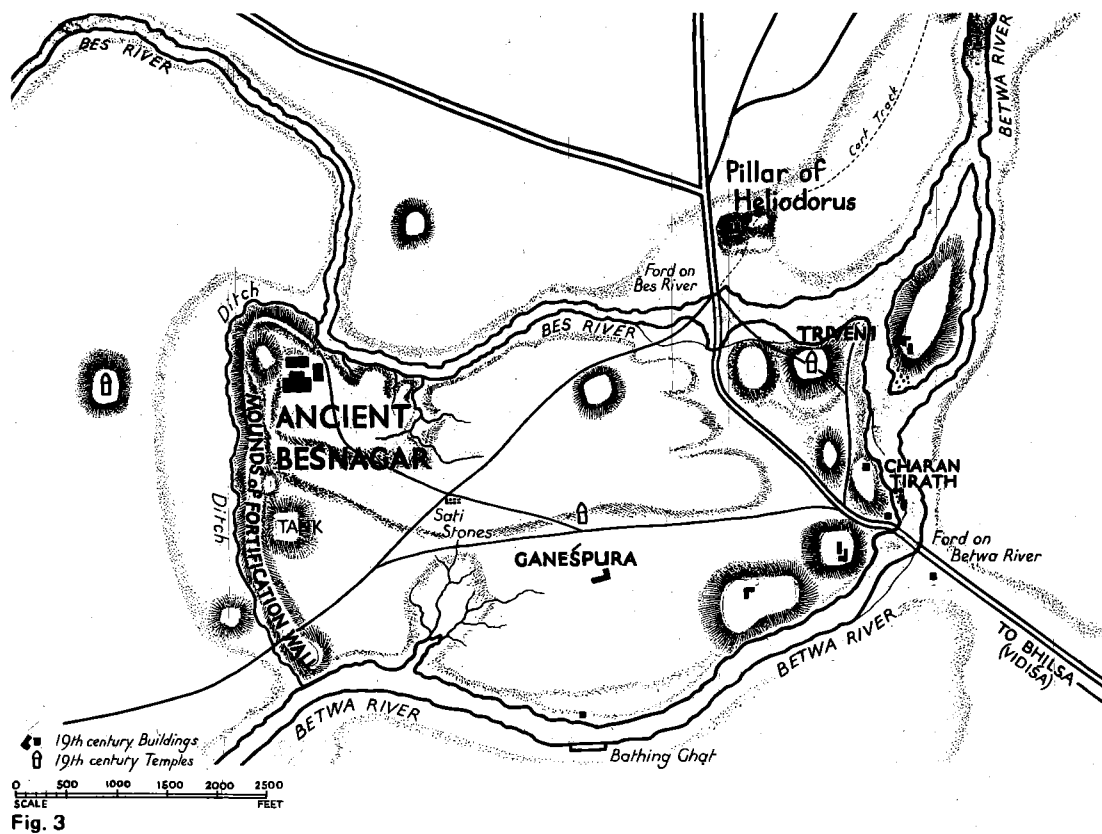
The first point to note is that the shaft is not tapered as in the cases of the 'Asokan' pillar and the portable *dhvaja*. Whereas the latter remind us of tree-trunks simply shorn of their branches and pared down to a smooth surface, the Heliodorus shaft is faceted, starting as an octagon, breaking down to sixteenths, and then to thirty-seconds, before a short round section is reached at the top. In other words, the Heliodorus is really a *sculpted post*. Looking next at its ornament, we recognise that its primary explanation is technical rather than decorative. Before lathes were used for fashioning large shafts, the only practicable technique was to start by hewing the log or stone into a quadruple; then, as a next stage, to break down the quadruple into an octagon; then from an octagon into sixteenths, and finally into thirty-seconds. From thirty-seconds, it was then easy to break straight into the round.

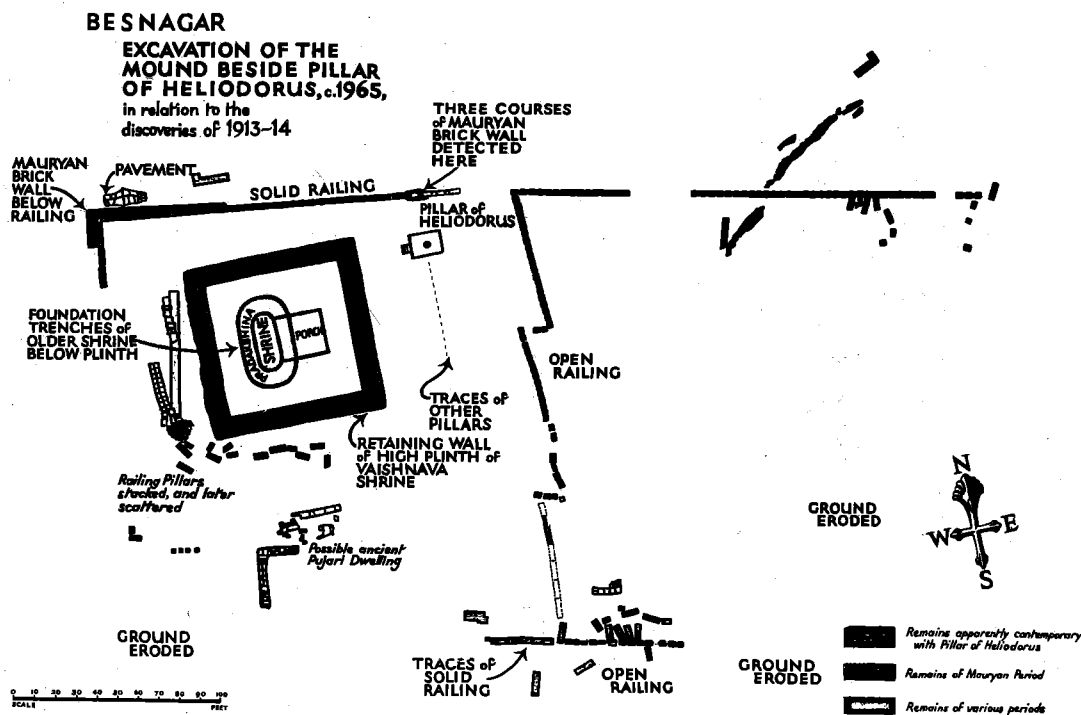
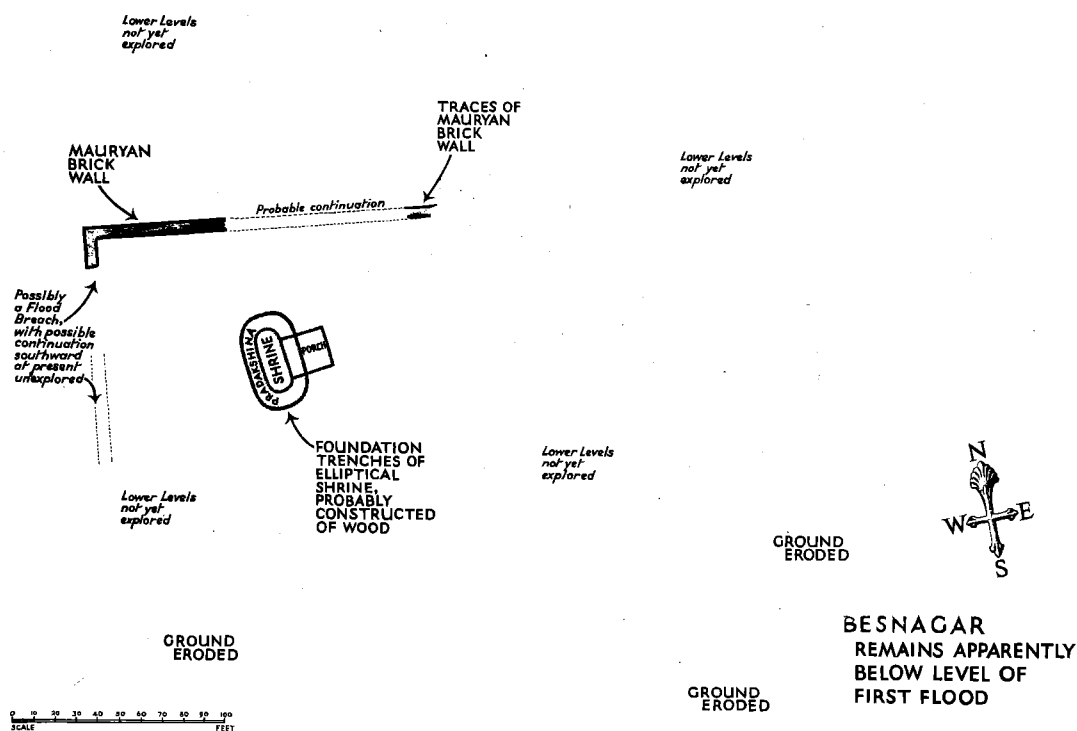
The advantage of working in these stages was that the sculptor had easy control of the stability of the form throughout all stages of the operation, difficult to achieve in any other way except by use of a lathe. But there was also an accompanying *dis*-advantage — that the shaft inevitably lost bulk or circumference at each stage. These points are clearly illustrated by the drawing at fig. 12. At the points where the facets are multiplied, there are inevitable 'steps' in the reduction of circumference. In other words, instead of tapering, the shaft extends upwards like an inverted camera-tripod.

What is remarkable about the Heliodorus Pillar is the skill with which the craftsman has



# HELIDORUS PILLAR





exploited the limitations of the technique for purely aesthetic ends. We can now recognise the functional role of the ornamental bands. Their primary function is to conceal what would otherwise be awkward to the eye. They disguise the 'steps' which would otherwise have spoiled the lines of the pillar. In short we are now in a position to recognise the Heliodorus shaft as a very sophisticated design, and as a conventionalised development of the sculpted post, aesthetically unrelated to the pole-type of shaft. It derives, in fact, from a different tradition. What was that different tradition? The answer, I believe, can be given by one word: the *yupa*.

The *yupa* is well-known as the sacrificial post of the Vedic altar — the post to which the animals were tied before blood sacrifice. In fact, the *yupa* was much more than that. It was pre-eminently the Cosmic Pillar or *axis mundi* of the Vedic Aryans. Because the *yupas* were originally of wood, none of the Vedic period now survive. However, in order to commemorate the sites at which sacrifices took place, *yupas* were sometimes (at later periods) copied in stone and erected as memorials. A number of these stone memorial-*yupas* do survive, giving us a clear idea of what the original wooden posts looked like. The drawing at fig. 11 shows a stone *yupa* of the first or second century A.D. discovered at Isapur, near Mathura.<sup>19</sup> Analysing its features, we will note that about three feet above original ground-level is clearly depicted the sacrificial rope to which the animal was tied, and that the rope is wound three times round the shaft as specified in the ancient texts. Near the top is an octagonal projecting band. (This had a symbolic meaning to which we shall be returning in a minute.) Hanging from the projection is a garland, which is probably the garland taken off the neck of the sacrificed animal. At the very top, the post curves. From the texts we know that it originally terminated in a wheel-like headpiece made of perishable material, the exact appearance of which we do not know. This wheel-headpiece (called the *casala*) was a sun-symbol.

Now turning to the symbolism of the different sections of the *yupa*, as described in Satapatha Brahmana,<sup>20</sup> we learn that the section below ground enabled the sacrificer to gain the World of the Fathers — in other words, to maintain contact with the dead ancestors

whose spirits were believed to have returned to the earth — in other words, to the womb. The sacrificial rope represents the human world, over which the sacrificer gains power by the sacrifice. The section between the sacrificial rope and the octagonal ring enables him to gain the World of the Gods. And the final section — the section above the octagonal ring — extends, we are told, into the highest celestial sphere of all. "Whoever knows this", says the Satapatha Brahmana, "reaches the most Blessed of All the Gods" — in other words Prajapati, identified with the *casala* or wheel-headpiece symbolising the sun.

The cosmic nature of the symbolism is enormously extended by rites associated with the carving and erection of the *yupa* — including the actual ritual-felling of the tree from which it was fashioned. Priests accompanied the woodcutter into the forest to identify the Sacred Tree, which was then addressed as *vanaspate-deva*, literally "the god who is lord of the forest." The leading priest then declaimed before it: «*With thy summit, do not rend the heavens* [in other words, do not damage the heavenly vault, *asman*, which it is the function of the Cosmic Pillar as separator of heaven and earth to sustain]. *With thy trunk, do not wound the atmosphere* [in other words, do not damage the upper sky, which is the region of the rain-bearing clouds]." After the felling, the trunk of the tree is then fashioned into a *yupa* by the sculptor, its form having to be octagonal. After it had been carved, the priest then declaimed to it: «*Lift thyself up, O Lord of the Forest, unto the summit of the earth! With thy top thou holdest up the heavens; with thy branches, thou fillest the air; with thy foot, thou steadiest the earth!*»

There could hardly be a clearer picture of the *yupa* as Cosmic Pillar or *axis mundi*, the mystical link between the three cosmic regions. And if anyone is unconvinced about this, there is still the rite of the sacrificer and his wife ascending the ladder to the top of the *yupa*, in symbolic ascent to the sun. When they reach the top and touch the wheel (*casala*), they exclaim: «*We have reached the light, the gods! We have become immortal! We have made contact with the very source of life (amrita abhuma)!*»<sup>21</sup>

With this symbolism in mind, let us look again at the shaft of the Heliodorus Pillar. What

is the significance of the swag-like ornamental band with the birds, for instance? Does anyone now see this to be purely decorative, and as the invention of the craftsman's fantasy? Or as Greek influence? Surely, it is nothing more nor less than a survival in decorative form of the sacrificial rope which (according to the texts) had to be wound three times round the shaft of the *yupa*? And if we are correct in this, then we can also infer that the birds, however stereotyped in their depiction here, are in origin geese or *hamsas*. The *hamsa*, as we have demonstrated in another context,<sup>22</sup> was the bird pre-eminently associated with the Cosmic Pillar and with the idea of union between heaven and earth. Admittedly, their stereotyping is such that the birds are no longer recognisably goose-like, whereas the birds appearing in the abacus in combination with the so-called 'honeysuckle' are unmistakeable as geese. However that may be, it is still plausible to suppose that the birds holding up the sacred cord derive from an earlier and more realistic depiction of the *hamsa* in association with the *yupa* — a reminder, surely, of that passage in Rgveda. III, 8.9 which has often puzzled scholars, a row of *yupas* erected before the sacrificial altar being likened to «*hamsas* flying in a line»?

This evidence raises a number of questions still to be answered. Why was the Heliodorus Pillar, recognised so obviously as linked with Vedic tradition, dedicated to Vasudeva? Who was Vasudeva? Why was he called god-of-gods? And finally, what of the elliptical temple Khare claimed to have found? It is too early to attempt anything like definitive answers to these difficult problems; but in our conclusion we shall try to indicate a few fruitful lines for further research.

Taking the last question first, are we so sure that the elliptical foundations discovered by Khare did in fact indicate the existence of a structural temple? Post poles are mentioned by him, but the sketchy information he gives does not in itself invite confidence in this conclusion. We shall require to see detailed drawings and plans before passing judgement. Scepticism should similarly be reserved for the assumption that the 'temple' contained an image of the god Vasudeva. Archaeology has not yet provided any evidence to prove that in the second century B.C. any of the major Brahmanical deities were worshipped in temples in human

form. The lesser deities — yes! Images of Yakshas, Nagas, Bhutas and suchlike were certainly worshipped in human form at this period, and earlier; but these were terrestrial genii who lived in close proximity with men, and whose divine powers did not extend beyond the groves, hillocks, rivers and ponds which were their actual abodes. But the *cosmic* deities who belonged to the higher celestial spheres are surely another matter? It is quite likely that in the second century B.C., Vasudeva was worshipped in aniconic form, perhaps only footprints (one of the forms in which Visnu was worshipped up to a later period).<sup>23</sup>

In key inscriptions of the early Vasudeva cult, the words rendered in the translations as 'temple' are in one case *prasada*, and in another *mahastana*. At this period, *prasada* could have meant simply a 'lofty seat or platform'.<sup>24</sup> *Mahastana* does not imply a structural building at all: it could mean simply an altar-throne or some other kind of sacred stone (*puja-sila*). Such aniconic shrines we know best in their Buddhist adaptations, but they must have been a common feature of cult-worship independently of Buddhism. They seem to have had two main lines of descent: one was from the Vedic altar; and the other from the non-Aryan *caitya* or folk-shrine which was especially associated in early times with *tirthas*, such as we recognise at Besnagar. And just as the *yupa* was an essential concomitant of the Vedic altar, so we know that some kind of pillar or *axis mundi* was commonly associated with the *caitya*.

And what of the Vasudeva cult itself? What does the evidence of the Heliodorus Pillar tell us about that? In fact, extraordinarily little is known about this cult as it flourished before the first century B.C. All accounts hitherto have been highly speculative. It is known, of course, that Visnu and Kṛṣṇa were identified with Vasudeva; but they were only two among many deities worshipped by the Bhagavatas, and just because of their overriding importance in the later Vaishnava religion, it is surely risky to interpret the Vasudeva cult simply as proto-Vaishnavism? Similarly, it has perhaps been too readily assumed that just because *Garudadhvajās* commonly appeared before Vishnu shrines at a later period, that they were necessarily associated with Vishnu at this period, too. It should not be forgotten that before Garuda became Visnu's carrier, he was identified with

# HELIDORUS PILLAR

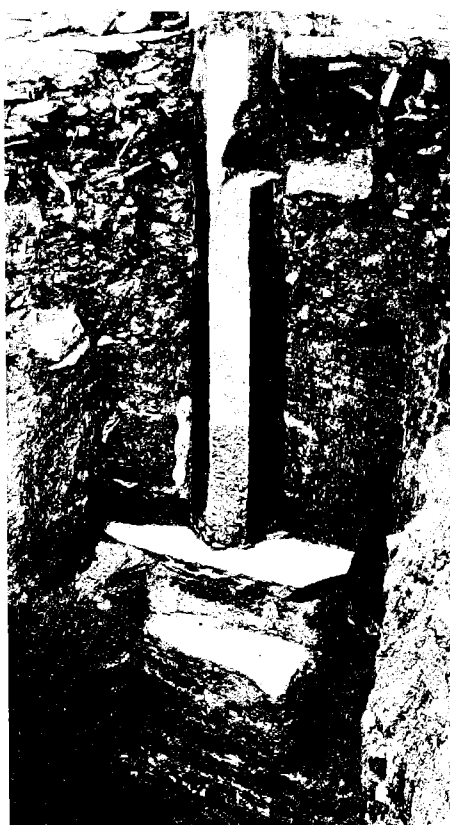


Fig. 7

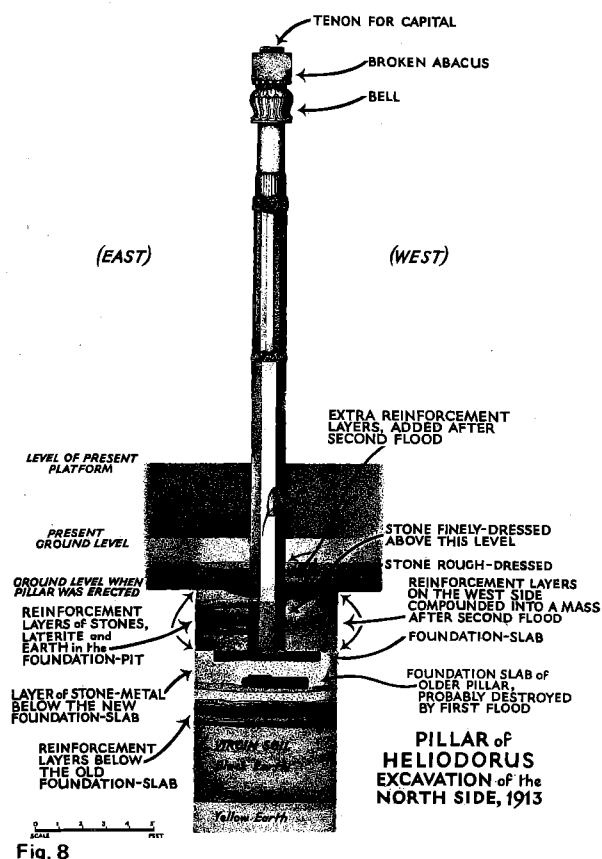


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

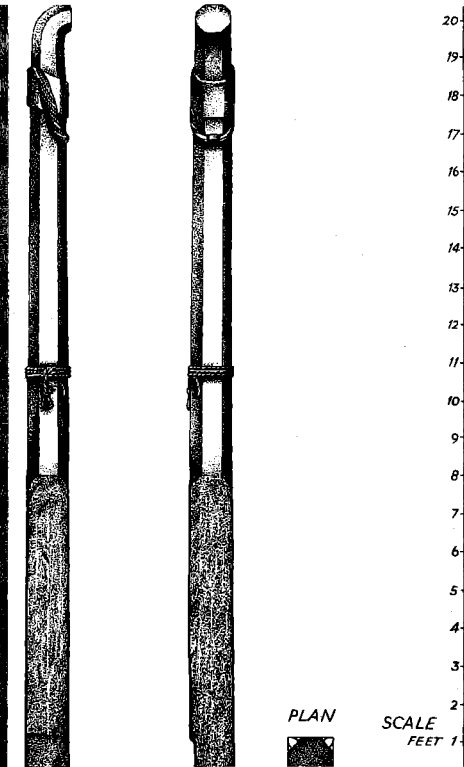


Fig. 11

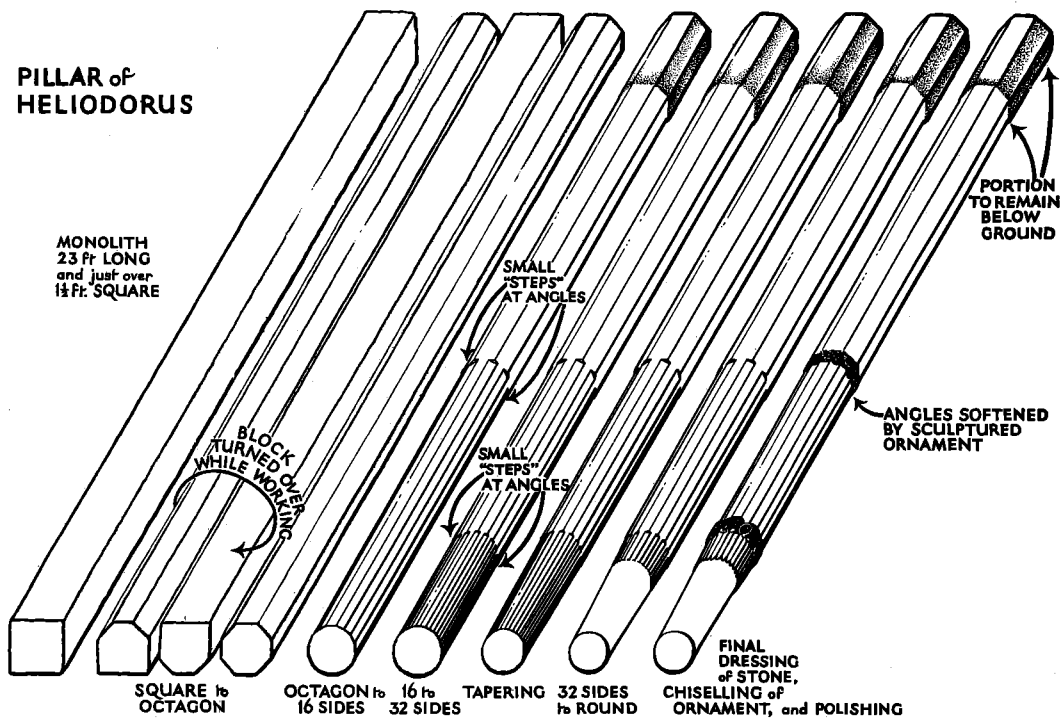


Fig. 12

Indra, and that according to the Taittiriya Brahmana, the erection of a *Garuda-dhvaja* was celebrated with an invocation of Indra: "*Imparter of blessing, lord of the people, the slayer of Vrtra, the vanquisher of the enemies, may the bull Indra go before us, etc.*"<sup>24</sup>

In early inscriptions, Vasudeva is described as the "god supreme above other gods" — *devadevasa* or *sarvesvara*. But supreme above what other gods? In attempt to answer this question, the late V.S. Agrawala took his cue from the tenth chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita, claiming Vasudeva as synonymous with the Supreme Being of that poem «*Vishnu among the Adityas... Indra among the gods... Siva among the rudras... Kubera among the Yakshas and Rakshasas... Meru among the mountains... Skanda among heroic warriors... Garuda among birds...*» and so forth, continuing with a long list. From this, Agrawala concluded that the Bhagavata religion was a syncretic cult uniting in its pantheon a very wide variety of deities, godlings and geni — Vedic as well as chthonic — and admitting them as different aspects of the One Supreme Being, Vasudeva. This religion he saw as the first popular, unifying creed evolved by Brahmanical tradition in response to the challenge of Buddhism.

One can only add that everything we know about the Heliodorus pillar and its site adds plausibility to this. The very design of the pillar seems to unite diverse strands of the Brahmanical inheritance, represented by the *yupa* and the *dhvaja*. If there is more than a hint of truth in this hypothesis, then it is surely time to recognise that the Heliodorus pillar deserves to be treated as something more than a footnote to the history of the Greeks in India. Instead, we should see it as deeply founded in Indian tradition, and as the key to an obscure phase in the history of Indian religion.

# NOTES

1. This paper is based on notes prepared for a lecture given in July, 1974, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
2. The polish has been partly obliterated above ground by the corrosive action of coatings of red-lead paste applied in worship (to be mentioned again presently).
3. I am much indebted to my colleague Miss Margaret Hall for the drawings published with this article, and also for many helpful comments and suggestions made in discussion.
4. *Archaeological Survey of India Reports*, vol. X, Calcutta, 1880, pp. 41-42.
5. *Ibid*, plate XIV, left.
6. *Ibid*, plate XIV, right.
7. *Ibid*, plate XV. This capital is now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta.
8. J.H. Marshall, "Notes on archaeological exploration in India, 1908-9", *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society*, London, 1909, pp. 1053-1056. Also, D.C. Sircar, *Select inscriptions*, vol. I, Calcutta, 1965, p. 88.
9. The Sonkh excavation report has not yet been published. The information was communicated in a lecture given by Dr. H. Hartel at the Musée Guimet, Paris, in September, 1974. The idea of Bhagabhadra or Bhagavata as a local ruler was first suggested as a hypothesis by A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks*, Oxford, 1957, p. 199, footnote, although he contradicts this conclusion in the text claiming identification with the ninth Sunga king as 'almost certain'.
10. Hemchandra Raychaudhuri, "The Mahabharata and the Besnagar Inscription of Heliodorus", *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XVIII, 192, Calcutta (1923).
11. D.R. Bhandarkar, "Excavations at Besnagar", *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1913-14*, pp. 186 ff.; and *ibid* 1914-15 pp. 66 ff.
12. M.D. Khare, "Discovery of a Vishnu temple near the Heliodorus Pillar", *Lalit Kala*, nos. 13-14, 1967-9, pp. 21-27.
13. *Ibid*, p. 21, footnote 1.
14. This refers to a series of lectures given by the present author at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University London, in December-January, 1973-74, and developed in the 1974 Lowell Institute Lectures given at Boston, Massachusetts. Publication of these lectures, under the title *Foundations of Indian Art*, is in preparation.
15. Comte du Mesnil du Buisson, "L'Etenard d'Atargatis et Hadad a Doura-Europos ou la déesse Sémia", *Revue des Arts Asiatique*, tome XI, Paris, 1937, pp. 75-87; and J. Przyluski, "Le culte de l'Etenard chez les Scythes et dans l'Inde", *Zalmoxis (Revue des Etudes religieuses)*, vol. I, Paris, 1938, pp. 13-19. See also in this connection a pioneer article by A.K. Mitra, "The Mauryan Lats or Dhvaja-stambhas: do they constitute an independent order?", *Journal and Proceedings of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Calcutta, New Series, 1934, pp. 317-326.
16. A.K. Mitra, *ibid*.
17. Sir John Marshall, *Mohenjodaro and the Indus civilization*, vol. III, P1. CXVI, figs. 5 and 8, London, 1931.
18. See Louis Renou, *Études sur le vocabulaire du*

- Rgveda*, premiere serie, published by Institut Français d'Indologie, Pondichery, 1958, pp. 15-18.
19. J. ph. Vogel, "The sacrificial posts of Isapur", *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India*, 1910-11, pp. 40-48.
  20. *Satapatha-brahmana according to the text of the Madhyandina School*, translated by J. Eggeling, Part II (Sacred Books of the East, vol. XXVI), pp. 162 ff.
  21. *Satapatha Brahmana*, 5, 2, 1, 9 ff. Quoted from J. Gonda, *Aspects of Early Vishnuism*, Utrecht, 1954, p. 83.
  22. 1974 Lowell Institute Lectures, Boston (see n. 14).
  23. In this connection, see D.R. Bhandarkar's comments on the famous Vasudeva inscription at Nagari: "Hathi-bada Brahmi inscription at Nagari", *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXII, 1938, pp. 198-205.
  24. For *prasada*, R.L. Turner, *Comparative dictionary of the Indo-Aryan languages*, London, 1966, p. 503, gives 'lofty seat or terrace'. A.A. Macdonnell and A.B. Keith, *Vedic Index*, vol. II, pp. 44 and 51, give 'walled mound supporting a raised platform'. Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu temple*, Calcutta, 1946, vol. I, p. 148, gives 'piled-up seat or altar', and of interest in this connection is her article, 'The four-cornered citadel of the Gods', *Journal of American Oriental Society*, vol. 75, 1955, pp. 184-187.
  25. Taittiriya Brahmana, III, 7, 11, 114. Quoted from S.A. Dange, *Legends in the Mahabharata*, Delhi, 1969, p. 123.
  3. Plan of Besnagar, site of the ancient city of Vidisa, showing position of Heliodorus Pillar. Drawn by Margaret Hall
  4. Trench-plan of 1913-14 excavations conducted by D.R. Bhandarkar at the site of the Heliodorus Pillar. Drawn by Margaret Hall from plans published in *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, 1913-14*.
  5. Diagrammatic reconstruction of the Heliodorus Pillar site, Phase I, circa 4th/2nd century B.C. Drawn by Margaret Hall after information provided by D.R. Bhandarkar in *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, 1913-14*, and by M.D. Khare in *Lalit Kala*, nos. 13-14, 1967-69
  6. Diagrammatic reconstruction of the Heliodorus Pillar site, Phase III, late 2nd c. B.C. Drawn by Margaret Hall, incorporating the results of M.D. Khare's excavations of 1963-65.
  7. Foundations of the Heliodorus Pillar, as revealed by D.R. Bhandarkar's 1913-14 excavations, and published in *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, 1913-14*.
  8. Drawing of foundations of the Heliodorus Pillar by Margaret Hall, based on information provided in the *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, 1913-14*.
  9. The elliptical plan of a shrine revealed by M.D. Khare's excavations at Besnagar in 1963-65, and published in *Lalit Kala*, nos. 13-14, 1967-69, fig. 2.
  10. Horserider carrying a *Garuda-dhvaja* (sacred standard bearing emblem of the mythical bird Garuda). From Bharhut Stupa, 2nd century B.C.
  11. Drawing by Margaret Hall of a stone memorial sacrificial post (*yupa*), found at Isapur, near Mathura; 1st/2nd century A.D. (After J. Ph. Vogel, "The sacrificial posts of Isapur", *Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India, 1910-11*, Plate XXIII.)
  12. Drawing by Margaret Hall illustrating the stages involved in the carving of the Heliodorus pillar-shaft.

#### LIST OF FIGURES

1. The Heliodorus Pillar at Besnagar, Central India
2. The ornamentation of the Heliodorus Pillar. Drawn by Margaret Hall.